

Our right of reply

What has happened to Elspeth King, Curator of the People's Palace, has focused attention on the whole issue of Glasgow as Culture City 1990 and the future of its people. On that point alone there is agreement with Pat Lally.

Unnamed Glasgow District Council executive sources are now telling the Glasgow Herald that Elspeth King and Michael Donnelly, assistant curator, made their priority the extension to the fabric and contents of the People's Palace rather than 'Glasgow's Glasgow' and the 1990 jamboree.

Mr Mark O'Neill on the other hand was heavily involved in preparing the 'Glasgow's Glasgow' exhibition at a time when the Springburn ^{Public} Hall was falling into disrepair and parts of the Springburn public park were being sold off to private house builders.

The connection now being made by his own officials between the District Council's 1990 plans and the shameful treatment of Elspeth King itself gives the lie to the group leader assertions by Labour X Lally that there was no political interference with regard to the appointment of the Keeper of Social History.

The mechanism for the political decision taken regarding Elspeth King was Julian Spalding, Director of Galleries and Museums who chaired the appointment committee, whose attitudes on the future direction of the Museums service are in accord with those of his political masters, and whose involvement in the sacking of the staff of the National Museum of Labour History in Manchester is well-documented.

Political direction

That political direction is one of finding ways of accommodating and utilising the commercialisation and privatisation of local council services as laid down by the Tory Government.

Glasgow District Council, led by Pat Lally, has decided to put out to private tender 60% of the work of the city's parks department, and has introduced charges for entry to the McLellan Galleries and 'Glasgow's Glasgow' thereby breaking the long-established principle of free access to our Museums and Galleries.

It has cut 10% off the budgets of all departments to pay for Culture City 1990. It has shed many hundreds of its employees' jobs as part of the process of competitive tendering.

Now it is about to hand over one third of Glasgow Green to private developers and make land available for private house-building on the Green.

Glasgow's 'Labour' establishment is selling off the city's municipal silver to encourage the development of a new investor-friendly Glasgow based on "cultural industries and tourism"....service industries, including financial services, administration, leisure and tourism". (All quotations from Councillor Lally).

The transfer of £157,000 from the Summerston waste disposal project to make up the deficit on 'Glasgow's Glasgow' is just one indicator of this.

The Culture of Capital

Of the Cultural Capital of Europe title, Labour group leader says "We are going to milk it for all it is worth" and use it to open up employment opportunities and attract relocations.

The cynical language employed here says it all as far as Pat Lally's 'non-dilettante' commitment to culture is concerned.

Having failed over many years to fight to defend jobs in Glasgow's traditional industries, these misnamed labour leaders are now proudly proclaiming their misuse of culture as a commodity to encourage capitalist investment particularly in the low-paid, non-unionised 'service industries'.

The future they project for the working people of Glasgow is one of an underclass of people working for little more than their dole money who will serve and entertain the tourists, administrators and financiers.

This is indeed the culture of Capital.

"A fact of life"

We do not see culture as 'clever and classless and free' ie ripe for exploitation. On the contrary, it reflects prevailing class forces and much of it forms part of the ideological cement which helps to maintain power in the hands of the few.

Much of the 1990 Culture City programme consists of traditional bourgeois culture of a fairly unadventurous kind eg opera, theatre, ballet, art exhibitions etc. We are of course in favour of wider access to the best that bourgeois culture has to offer.

Yet this is precisely where the contradiction arises, for so long as that culture is privately-controlled and inevitably seeks to command the highest price it can in the market place, it will continue to remain an elitist activity attended mainly by those who can afford the kind of exorbitant prices charged by Pavarotti's agent and the Harvey Goldsmith agency.

Does Bob Palmer's favourite Castlemilk punter, if she (or he) exists, still feel satisfied after the Pavarotti concert which contained only 32 minutes of her idol singing, at anything from £1 to £5 per minute depending on whether the original or tout prices were paid? Or was the Pavarotti do not just one gigantic rip-off, sanctioned and promoted by Messrs Palmer, Lally and co.?

Similarly, in what way does the District Council's £400,000+ down payment towards Frank Sinatra coming to Ibrox do anything to promote the culture of the people of Glasgow?

The plain 'cultural' "fact of life" which Pat Lally appears so ready to accept is one of commercialism and greed.

An alternative culture

There is an alternative culture to this commercial circus. One which is based on the struggle of oppressed people, who in Glasgow are working class people, together with those writers, singers, artists, playwrights, actors etc who identify themselves with that struggle.

Glasgow has a rich tradition of such a culture and people, from Sandy Rogers and James Macfarlane in the 19th century up to Freddy Anderson, Alasdair Gray and Tom Leonard today.

This kind of cultural activity has in fact been growing in and around the city in recent years, as it has in Eastern Europe, South Africa and elsewhere. It has taken place independently of the 1990 bandwagon, and continues to flourish.

as possible
What the 1990 Festivals Unit has tried to do is take as much of this cultural development under its wing and try to use it for its own economic and political ends.

It is because they do not wish to be used in this way that some of our best writers and cultural workers will have nothing to do with the Festivals Unit or their money.

Of course the most notable of this year's official events have been those like the Ruchazie Street Project and Govan Stories etc which have involved and given free expression to the (extra-) ordinary people of the west of Scotland.

The acid test of these and other of the year's cultural activities will be how far they continue to grow and develop once 1990 is over.

Tells the truth

We are not against culture, on the contrary, we are wholly in favour of a culture which tells the truth about the world, both natural and social. Such a truth cannot but cut through the false images and myths of the Merchant/Culture City created by the well-paid (and -heeled) advertising companies employed by the District Council.

Such a culture cannot but reveal Glasgow as a city of enormous contradictions, ridden with class divisions between those suffering intolerable poverty and housing conditions and the minority of "well-heeled" rich. It is one of the most proletarian of cities with a strong tradition of struggle, whose working people are again growing in self-confidence, and who can and will put an end to the kind of dirty work being done to Glasgow Green and elsewhere by the friends of the property developers.

Such a live culture is much more than the kind of spectator sport which the tourist trade purveyors like Councillor Lally would have us believe. It releases all of the creative energies which this society has suppressed, stunted or misdirected.

Once released, such energies cannot but have political consequences, as the downfall in Eastern Europe of more powerful Stalinist regimes than Group leader Lally's has shown.

All the facts

We want to know all the facts about the finances and cost of Culture City 1990, including its sinking Marie Celeste of a flagship, 'Glasgow's Glasgow'.

We want to know all the facts about the umpteen property deals affecting Glasgow's public parks and other municipal land.

We want to know all the facts about Frank Lafferty's dealings with Glasgow District Council.

What about an interim account and assessment of this halfway through 1990, Councillor Lally?

Workers City

Those who know us will know that the last thing we are is a group of dilettantes. As for hysteria, that seems to be coming exclusively from the direction of Neil "I demand that you stop" Wallace, deputy director of festivals, and Pat 'cultural milker' Lally.

Councillor Lally's talk of "whingers" and "the pro-poverty lobby" sounds much the same as the Tories denouncing those who dare to criticise their attacks on the poor.

Campaign

We intend to continue to campaign throughout 1990 and beyond to expose the Council's follies of 1990, and to defend Elspeth King, the Glasgow Green and the people's culture in "the Glasgow Keelie".

We will also continue to develop our own cultural activities whether in prose, poetry, song, imaginative politics, other media or in our own series of Workers City Nights.

Those who wish to help us are welcome to come along to our open meetings in the Scotia Bar any Monday night.

Yes, the future of our city is in the hands of its people rather than in the Council's. Let the politicians know what you think.

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| Ed Donaldson | Leslie Foster | Jeanette McGinn | Jack Withers |
| Norman Bissell | Ian McKechnie | Tommy Keyes | Farquhar McLay |
| Elaine Smith | Jim Kelman | Brendan McLaughlin | Jim McKay |
| Hugh Savage | | | |
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